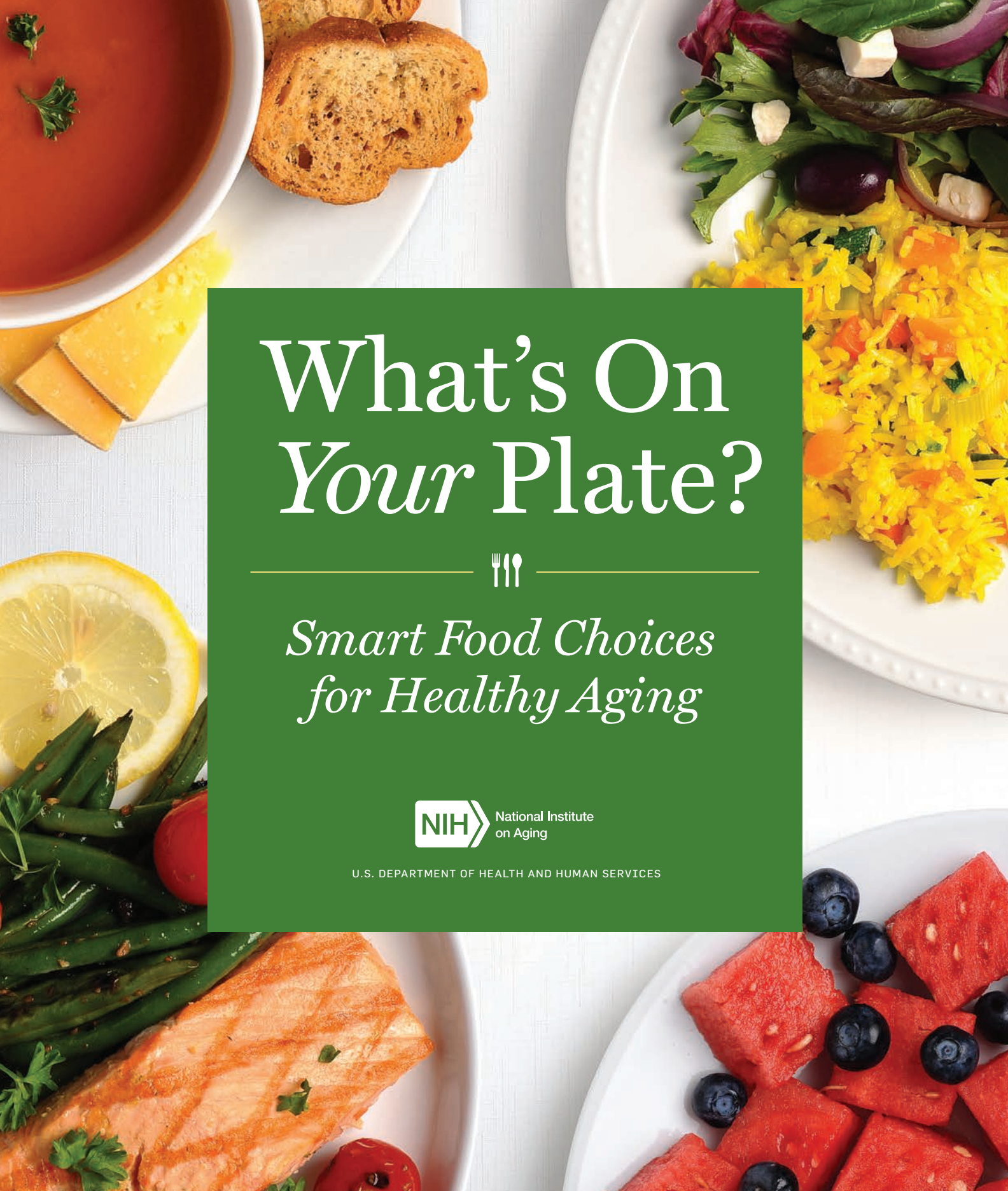

What's On *Your* Plate?

Smart Food Choices for Healthy Aging

NIH National Institute on Aging

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Introduction

It's time to make lifestyle changes so you can stay active in the upcoming years. Research shows that it's never too late to make smarter food choices and add healthy habits, like being physically active, to help reduce your risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis.

Making wise food choices as you grow older might be easier than you think. In *What's On* Your *Plate? Smart Food Choices for Healthy Aging*, the National Institute on Aging (NIA), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), shows you how to make good food choices part of your daily life and adjust those choices as you grow older.

What's On Your *Plate?* follows the nutrition recommendations for older adults in the *2020- 2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Every five years, the USDA and HHS use the latest nutrition research to develop the *Dietary Guidelines*, which encourages people to make healthy food and beverage choices in their daily lives. The *Dietary Guidelines* is based on evidence from research, including studies conducted and supported by NIH.

This booklet provides advice on what and how much to eat, as well as how to overcome challenges to maintaining a healthy eating pattern. We hope you find *What's On* Your *Plate?* a valuable resource to make smarter food choices and stay healthy as you age. A list of more resources about healthy eating and healthy aging begins on page 64.

Healthy Eating Patterns

When Nick and Diana *both turned 60, they decided to make some changes in their lives. They'd put on some weight, and their doctor said their cholesterol levels were going up. They started to feel sluggish after eating instead of energized. Over the past few years, they'd been busy with work, children, and caring for their aging parents. They found that they were cooking less and less, often getting takeout or eating prepackaged foods. They wanted to make better choices but felt overwhelmed and unsure of how to start.*

Older adults can find nutrition information they can trust in the *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which contains advice about how to shift toward healthier food and beverage choices. The *Dietary Guidelines* provides advice on how to achieve a healthy eating pattern — a style of eating based on both health and individual food preferences. There are several different healthy eating patterns to choose from, all of which can support health as you age.

Four Major Recommendations for Healthy Eating

You may need to make some changes in your food and beverage choices to achieve a healthy eating pattern. It's easier than you think! A healthy eating pattern is not a rigid prescription. Rather, it's a framework that lets you enjoy food that meets your personal preferences and fits your budget. To encourage healthy eating patterns, the *Dietary Guidelines* provides four major recommendations:

1. **Follow a healthy dietary pattern at every life stage.** At every life stage — infancy, toddlerhood, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy, lactation, and older adulthood — it's never too early or too late to eat healthfully.

2. **Customize and enjoy nutrient-dense food and beverage choices to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations.** A healthy dietary pattern can benefit all individuals regardless of age, race, ethnicity, or current health status. The *Dietary Guidelines* provides a framework intended to be customized to individual needs and preferences, as well as the eating styles of the diverse cultures in the United States.

3. **Focus on meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages and stay within calorie limits.** An underlying premise of the *Dietary Guidelines* is that nutritional needs should be met primarily from foods and beverages — specifically, nutrient-dense foods and beverages. Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components and have no or little added sugars, saturated fat, or sodium. A healthy dietary pattern consists of nutrient-dense forms of foods and beverages across all food groups, in recommended amounts, and within calorie limits.

4. **Limit foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium, and limit alcoholic beverages.** A healthy dietary pattern doesn't have much room for added sugars, saturated fat, or sodium — or for alcoholic beverages. A small amount of sugars, saturated fat, or sodium can be added to nutrient-dense foods and beverages to help meet food group recommendations, but foods and beverages high in these components should be limited.

Eating Patterns

The *Dietary Guidelines* describes three USDA Food Patterns: The Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern, the Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating Pattern, and the Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern. Each eating pattern includes slight variations in amounts recommended from different food groups. However, they are all designed to meet nutrient needs while staying within calorie limits. And they all include the characteristics of healthy eating patterns that research has linked to reduced risk of certain diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes. You can adapt any of these eating patterns to suit your cultural or personal preferences.

Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern

This eating pattern is based on the types and amounts of foods Americans typically consume, but in nutrient-dense forms and in healthy portions. Nutrient-dense foods give you lots of vitamins, minerals, and fiber without a lot of extra calories. This eating pattern also can help you avoid eating too many calories from non-nutritious sources. The main types of food in this eating pattern include a variety of vegetables (including dark green, red, and orange vegetables; beans and peas; and starchy vegetables like corn); fruits; whole grains; fat-free or low-fat dairy; seafood, poultry, meat, and eggs; and nuts, seeds, and soy products.

The DASH Eating Plan

The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) healthy eating pattern is a lot like the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern. It emphasizes vegetables, fruits, fat-free or low-fat dairy, whole grains, poultry, fish, beans, and nuts. It's low in sweets, sugar-sweetened drinks, saturated fats, and red meat. It has less sodium than the typical American diet. Studies have shown that following DASH can lower blood pressure and LDL ("bad") cholesterol. For more information, visit *www.nhlbi.nih.gov/dash*.

Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating Pattern

This eating pattern adapts the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern to reflect Mediterranean-style diets that have been shown to be good for your health. It contains more fruits and seafood and less dairy than the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern. There is also less calcium and vitamin D because it includes fewer dairy foods.

Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern

This eating pattern contains no meat, poultry, or seafood but does contain fat-free or low-fat dairy. Compared with the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern, it contains more soy products (such as tofu), eggs, beans and peas, nuts and seeds, and whole grains. It's somewhat higher in calcium and fiber and lower in vitamin D compared to the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern.

The chart below shows how many calories per day, on average, are needed for men and women over age 60. Because calorie needs vary based on age, height, weight, and level of physical activity, you may need more or fewer calories than shown here. For a personalized calorie target, go to *www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan*.

How Many Calories Do You Need?

For a Woman

Not physically active	Moderately active	Active lifestyle
1,600 calories	1,800 calories	2,000-2,200 calories

For a Man

Not physically active	Moderately active	Active lifestyle
2,000-2,200 calories	2,200-2,400 calories	2,600 calories

"Not physically active" means a lifestyle that only includes basic movements from daily life activities. "Moderately active" means a lifestyle that adds about 1.5 to 3 miles of brisk walking per day or a similar amount of a different physical activity. "Active" means a lifestyle that adds more than three miles of brisk walking per day or a similar amount of a different physical activity. Other physical activities include dancing, jogging, tennis, or swimming.

How many calories a person needs affects the quantities of food they should eat. For example, the chart below shows the recommended amounts of food to eat at different calorie levels for the Healthy U.S. Style Eating Pattern.

Healthy U.S.- Style Eating Pattern: What and How Much To Eat Per Day at Different Calorie Levels

Food Group	1,600 Calories	2,000 Calories	2,400 Calories
Vegetables	2 c-eq*	2 1/2 c-eq	3 c-eq
Fruits	1 1/2 c-eq	2 c-eq	2 c-eq
Grains	5 oz-eq	6 oz-eq	8 oz-eq
Protein foods**	5 oz-eq	5 1/2 oz-eq	6 1/2 oz-eq
Dairy	3 c-eq	3 c-eq	3 c-eq
Oils	22 g	27 g	31 g
Calories for other uses	100 calories (7% of total calories)	240 calories (12% of total calories)	320 calories (13% of total calories)

**Food group amounts are shown in cup-equivalents (c-eq) or ounce-equivalents (oz-eq). Oils are shown in grams (g).*

***Protein can come from many different types of food. The table above shows the recommended total amount of protein per day. The following shows the recommended amounts of specific sources of protein per week.*

Protein Source	1,600 Calories	2,000 Calories	2,400 Calories
Seafood	8 oz-eq	9 oz-eq	10 oz-eq
Meat, poultry, eggs	23 oz-eq	26 oz-eq	31 oz-eq
Nuts, seeds, soy products	4 oz-eq	5 oz-eq	5 oz-eq

Cup- and Ounce-Equivalents

Daily intake amounts listed in terms of cups or ounces may not actually translate to cups or ounces of the food you're eating. This is because some foods are denser than others, and some have more air or contain more water. For example, in the vegetables food group, 1 cup of raw spinach and 1/2 cup of cooked spinach both count as 1 cup-equivalents because they have the same nutritional value. Cup- and ounce-equivalents help you understand the different amounts of foods from each food group that you should eat. Pages 11-25 show equivalent amounts of food within each food group.

This table compares the *Dietary Guidelines*' three healthy eating patterns for a person who eats 2,000 calories per day. The column for the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern is the same as the 2,000-calories (middle) column on page 8.

Healthy Eating Patterns: 2,000-Calorie Level Amounts

Food Group	U.S.-Style	Mediterranean -Style	Vegetarian
Vegetables	2 1/2 c-eq	2 1/2 c-eq	2 1/2 c-eq
Fruits	2 c-eq	2 1/2 c-eq	2 c-eq
Grains	6 oz-eq	6 oz-eq	6 1/2 oz-eq
Protein foods**	5 1/2 oz-eq	6 1/2 oz-eq	3 1/2 oz-eq
Dairy	3 c-eq	2 c-eq	3 c-eq
Oils	27 g	27 g	27 g
Calories for other uses	240 calories (12% of total calories)	240 calories (12% of total calories)	250 calories (13% of total calories)

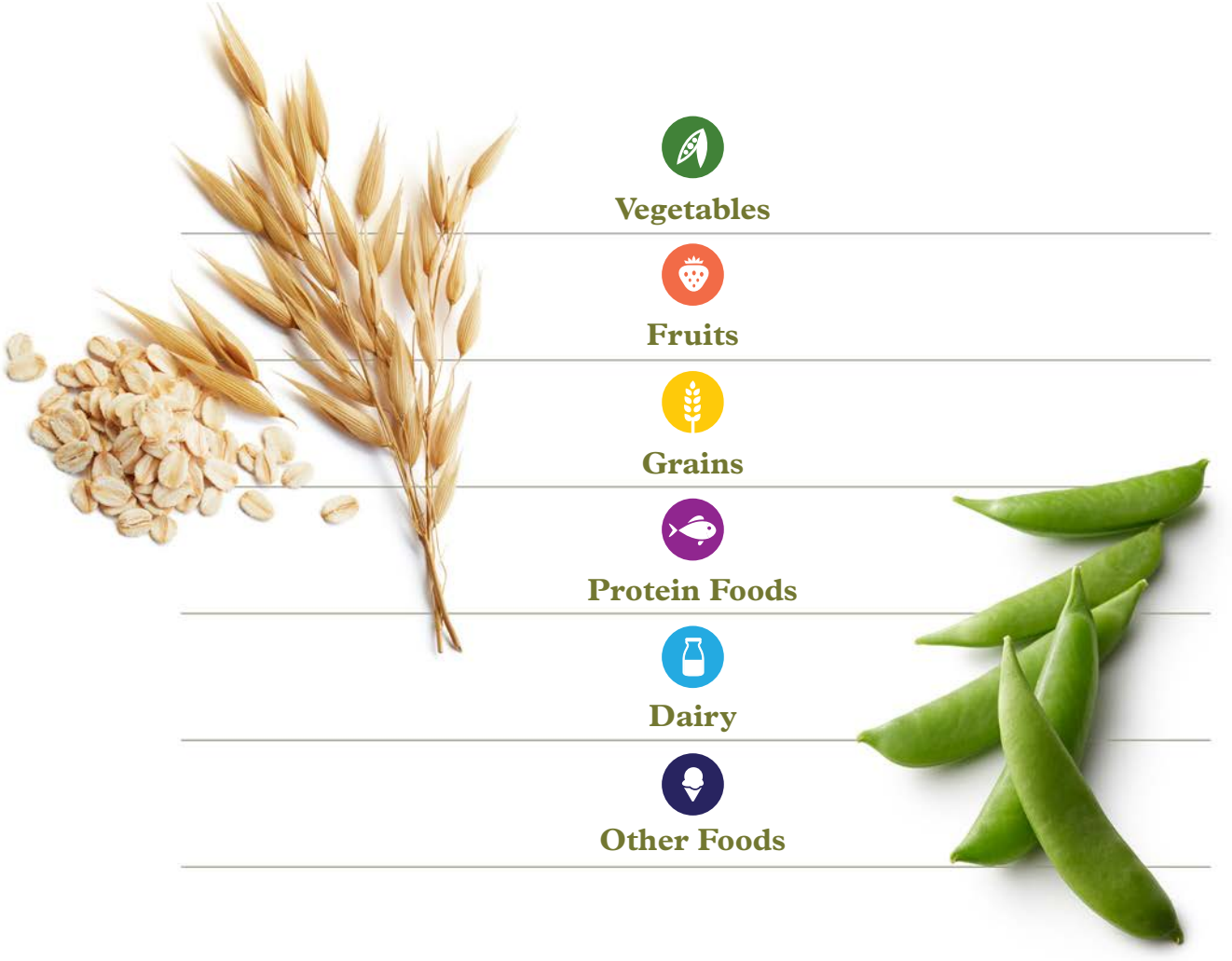
**Food group amounts are shown in cup-equivalents (c-eq) or ounce-equivalents (oz-eq). Oils are shown in grams (g).*

***Protein can come from many different types of food. The table above shows the recommended total amount of protein per day. The following shows the recommended amounts of specific sources of protein per week.*

Protein Source	U.S.-Style	Mediterranean -Style	Vegetarian
Seafood	9 oz-eq	15 oz-eq	--
Meat, poultry, eggs	26 oz-eq	26 oz-eq	3 oz-eq (eggs)
Nuts, seeds, soy products	5 oz-eq	5 oz-eq	15 oz-eq

Know Your Food Groups

Let's look more closely at the recommendations for the different food groups in each of the eating patterns described in the *Dietary Guidelines*. What foods are in each group? What are protein foods? How much of your daily fruit need is met by a medium banana? How should you count beverages? Starting on the next page, you'll find the answers to these and similar questions, as well as more detailed information about the five major food groups and calories for other uses. We've also included some examples of equivalent amounts of food within each food group.



Vegetables

When Christine was growing up, *she never wanted to eat vegetables. Her mother would boil vegetables until they were overcooked and bland. When she moved out on her own, Christine took cooking classes and learned how to roast, steam, sauté, and broil vegetables. She learned how to add flavor to vegetable dishes with spices, herbs, and citrus. Now, eating the recommended amount of veggies no longer feels like a chore.*

Vegetables come in a wide variety of colors, flavors, and textures. They contain vitamins, minerals, and carbohydrates, and are an important source of fiber. The vegetable food group includes dark green vegetables, red and orange vegetables, starchy vegetables, and legumes (beans and peas). Dark green vegetables include broccoli, collard greens, spinach, and kale. Red and orange vegetables include acorn squash, carrots, pumpkin, tomato, and sweet potato.

Here's a Tip

In general, ½ cup of raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice, or 1 cup of raw leafy greens, can be considered as ½ cup-equivalent from the vegetables group.

Starchy vegetables include corn, green peas, and white potatoes. Other vegetables include eggplant, beets, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, celery, artichokes, green beans, and onions. Legumes include black beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, soybeans, and tofu. Legumes can also be counted in the protein foods group. (See the tip on page 20.) To see more foods in the vegetable group, visit *www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/vegetables*.

Did You Know?

Fiber is a type of carbohydrate that your body doesn't break down. It's found in many foods that come from plants, including vegetables, beans, and peas. Eating fiber-rich vegetables can help prevent stomach or intestinal problems and lower cholesterol.

1/2 Cup-Equivalent of Vegetables Equals:

1 cup uncooked spinach

6 baby carrots

1/2 cup cooked kidney beans

1 small (6-inch) ear corn

1 small (less than 2” diameter) baked potato

1/2 cup broccoli florets

1 large stalk celery

1/2 large (3-inch diameter, 3 and 3/4-inch long) red pepper

1/2 cup cooked green beans

Fruits

Other than orange juice *in the morning, Jesse rarely has fruit. When he buys fruit from the grocery store, he often forgets it in the drawer in the fridge. Fresh fruit isn't available at the office, so he often buys snack foods from the vending machine. Jesse noticed that some of his colleagues brought fruit to work and realized he could easily throw an apple or banana in his bag. Since then, he's been bringing fresh fruit, too, for a healthy afternoon snack.*

Fruits bring color, flavor, and important nutrients to your diet. There are so many choices — citrus fruits like oranges and grapefruits; different kinds of berries; fruits that grow on trees, such as apricots, cherries, peaches, and mangoes; and others like figs, grapes, and pineapples.

Here's a Tip

Do you wonder how many vegetables and fruits you should eat at a meal? Look at your plate. Vegetables and fruits should fill up half the dish.

Older Americans generally don't eat enough fruit. Adding more fruit to your diet can have significant benefits for overall health. Fruits, like vegetables, contain carbohydrates and provide extra fiber that helps keep your digestive system moving. For even more fiber, eat fruits with the skin on — just make sure you wash all fruits thoroughly before eating.

Although 100% fruit juice also counts toward this category, at least half of the fruits you eat should be whole fruits. When purchasing frozen, canned, or dried fruit, choose options that are lowest in added sugars. To see more foods in the fruit group, visit *https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/fruits*.

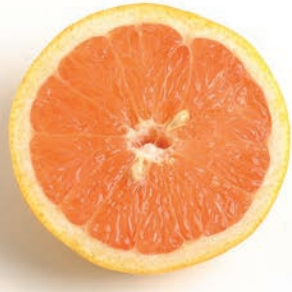
1/2 Cup-Equivalent of Fruit Equals:

1 small piece fruit, such as a 2-inch peach or large plum

1/2 large (8-inch) banana

1/4 cup dried fruit

1/2 cup 100% orange juice



1/2 medium grapefruit

1/8 medium canteloupe

1/2 -inch wedge watermelon

1/2 cup grapes

4 strawberries

Grains

Alicia loves pasta and bread. *After eating a big bowl of pasta, she often feels hungry just a couple hours later. Alicia knows that simple carbohydrates like white rice, bread, and pasta aren't very healthy, so she has started to replace them with whole wheat and whole grain varieties. Because whole wheat pasta keeps her full longer, it's easier for her to eat less and stay within her recommended calorie goals.*

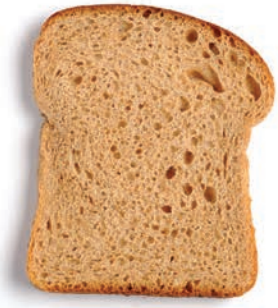
Any food made from wheat, rye, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley, or other cereal grain is a grain product. This includes bread and pasta, breakfast cereal, grits, tortillas, and even popcorn. Grains — along with fruits, vegetables, and dairy — contain carbohydrates.

Read food labels to find grain choices that are low in saturated fat and added sugar. Be especially wary of options labeled "low-fat," which can be high in added sugar.

At least half the grain foods you eat should be whole grains. Whole grains provide iron and many B vitamins, and they have fiber, too. Examples of whole grains include whole wheat, whole oats, whole bulgur (also known as cracked wheat), and whole cornmeal.

Some grain products are refined, which gives them a finer texture and a longer shelf life but removes fiber and nutrients. Most refined grains are enriched, which means that some nutrients are added back after processing. Examples of refined grain products include white flour, degermed cornmeal, white bread, and white rice. To see more foods in the grain food group, visit *www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/grains*.

1 Ounce-Equivalent of Grain Equals:



1 slice bread

1/2 English muffin

1 mini-bagel

1/3 cup oatmeal

1 cup breakfast cereal
(flakes, rounds, or puffed)

1/2 cup cooked cereal,
rice,or pasta

2 (3-inch) pancakes

3 cups popcorn

1 small (6-inch diameter)
corn or flour tortilla

Protein Foods

As an older man, *Joshua knows that getting enough protein is important for maintaining his muscles. He realizes that relying on hamburgers, barbecued pork, and fried chicken isn't the best way to eat enough protein. After talking with his doctor, Joshua shifted to eating leaner proteins that are low in saturated fats, such as skinless chicken, fish, and beans.*

Proteins are often called the body's building blocks. They help build and repair tissues, and also help your body fight infection. Your body uses extra protein for energy. Older adults should try to eat a variety of nutrient-dense proteins. Choose lean (low-fat) meats and poultry. Keep in mind that you can also get protein from seafood, eggs, beans, nuts, seeds, and soy products. Protein from plant sources tends to be lower in saturated fat, contains no cholesterol, and provides fiber and other health-promoting nutrients. Plant sources of protein, such as nuts and seeds, have different nutritional value than plant-based meat alternatives, which can be heavily processed and high in sodium.

Here's a Tip

Are you confused about whether to count beans and peas as vegetables or protein foods? Try this — count them in the vegetables group if you regularly eat meat, poultry, and fish. Count them in the protein foods group if you are a vegetarian or vegan or if you seldom eat meat, poultry, or fish.

The Dietary Guidelines recommends that you eat 8 to 10 ounces per week of a variety of seafood, not only for the protein but also because seafood contains omega-3 fatty acids, such as EPA and DHA, which are good for your heart. Seafoods that are higher in EPA and DHA include salmon, anchovies, and trout. These seafoods are also lower than some other types of seafood in mercury, which can be harmful. To see more foods in the protein food group, visit *www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/protein-foods*.

1 Ounce-Equivalent of Protein Foods Equals:

1/2 ounce nuts
(12 almonds, 24 pistachios, or 7 walnut halves)

1 ounce cooked salmon

1 tablespoon peanut butter

1/2 cup split pea, lentil, or other bean soup

1/4 cup cooked beans

1/4 cup tofu

1 egg

1 ounce cooked lean beef, lean pork, chicken, or turkey

2 tablespoons hummus

Dairy

Jamal loves drinking milk, *so it's not a problem for him to get three cups a day. But his wife, Brianna isn't a milk drinker. She loves cheese, but her doctor told her to limit full-fat dairy as a part of managing her cholesterol. Now, Brianna meets her daily dairy needs by incorporating more non- and low-fat yogurt and cheeses into her diet.*

Consuming dairy helps older adults maintain strong bones and provides several vital nutrients, including calcium, potassium, and vitamin D. Pick from the many low-fat or fat-free choices in the dairy group — these give you important vitamins and minerals, with less fat. Certain fortified dairy alternatives can provide similar nutritional content to dairy. To see more foods in the dairy group, visit *www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/dairy*.

Dairy Alternatives

For individuals who choose dairy alternatives, only some of these products are included as part of the dairy group and have nutritional content similar to dairy. These include fortified soy milk and yogurt, which have calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin D added.

Other plant-based milks (for example, almond, rice, coconut, oat, and hemp milks) may contain calcium, but aren't always fortified with the vitamins and minerals present in dairy. Look out for added sugars in dairy alternatives. Reading the label can help you choose unsweetened or low-sugar options.

1 Cup-Equivalent of Dairy Equals:

1 cup yogurt

1 and 1/2 ounces hard cheese, such as cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, or Parmesan

1 cup milk or calcium-fortified soy beverage

2 cups cottage cheese

1 cup pudding made with milk

1/3 cup shredded cheese

Other Foods

Gabriel enjoys a donut with his coffee, *every Sunday. As he starts to shift his diet toward a healthier eating pattern, he wonders whether he can still indulge in this weekly treat.*

Older adults can follow a healthy eating pattern and still have an occasional treat. The *Dietary Guidelines* puts aside a small number of calories for such purposes. An older adult who follows the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern for 2,000 calories per day (see page 8) has 270 calories per day for "other uses." Calories in this category can allow older adults to eat a little extra of a food they enjoy or even a food that's not very nutritious. For example, calories for "other uses" can be used to eat an extra helping of salmon, to add butter to your baked potato, or even to treat yourself to a glazed donut.

Here's a Tip

The suggested amounts of oils in the *Dietary Guidelines* are given in grams. How would you measure that? A teaspoon of oil has about 4.5 grams of fat.

Some foods are not in any of the main food groups. These include oils, which can be eaten regularly as part of a healthy diet, as well as unhealthy fats, sugars, and calories from drinks, which should only be consumed occasionally. There is no recommended daily intake amount in cups or ounces for these products, so they fall into the "calories for other uses" category. Limiting the calories you consume from this category can help keep your healthy eating habits on track.

Oils and solid fats. Oils are high in calories, but they are also an important source of nutrients like vitamin E. For older adults, the daily allowance of oils ranges from 5 to 8 teaspoons, depending on activity level. Oils contain monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which are healthy fats that give you energy and help the body absorb certain vitamins.

Measuring your daily oils can be tricky — knowing what you add while cooking or baking is one thing, but oil is naturally a part of some foods. More information about oils can be found at *www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/more-key-topics*.

Teaspoons of Oil:

1/2 medium avocado has
3 teaspoons of oil

4 large ripe olives have
1/2 teaspoon of oil

1 ounce dry-roasted nuts has
3 teaspoons of oil

1 ounce sunflower seeds has
3 teaspoons of oil

1 tablespoon mayonnaise (not
mayonnaise-type salad dressing)
has 2 and 1/2 teaspoons of oil

1 tablespoon peanut butter
has 2 teaspoons of oil

In general, try to use oils instead of solid fats, such as butter or lard, which are high in saturated fat. Saturated fats occur naturally in some foods, but they are also added to foods such as baked goods and potato chips. To lower the saturated fat in your diet, eat low-fat or fat-free dairy products, choose cuts of meat with less fat, and remove the skin from chicken. Reading the Nutrition Facts label can help you keep track of how much saturated fat you consume.

You should also keep trans fat intake as low as possible. Trans fats are harmful, and although they are being phased out of many products, they can still be found in some processed foods, such as microwave popcorn, frozen pizza, margarine, and coffee creamer.

Added sugars. Limit the consumption of foods high in added sugar, which include sweetened cereals and highly processed snack foods such as cookies and cakes, dairy desserts, and many items marketed as low-fat. Read the ingredient list to see if the food you're eating has added sugar. Some key words to look for: brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, and high-fructose corn syrup. See pages 41-43 to learn more about food labels.

Beverages

Although many beverages can be part of a healthy eating pattern, some add calories without adding nutritional value and you should avoid them.

Coffee and tea. Drinking coffee or tea barely provides any calories unless you add sugar or cream, which aren't nutrient-dense and should be consumed in moderation. Be cautious when ordering drinks from coffee shops because these are often loaded with extra sugars and fats.

Sweetened beverages. Examples of beverages that often have added sugars are soda, fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, and sweetened waters. Most sweetened beverages don't contribute to meeting food group goals and often contain a high number of calories.

Alcohol. Alcohol isn't nutrient-dense and isn't part of the healthy eating patterns recommended in the *Dietary Guidelines*. If you consume alcohol, do so in moderation, defined as one drink or less per day for women and two drinks or less per day for men.

Don't Feel Thirsty?

With age, you might lose some of your sense of thirst. To further complicate matters, some medicines require plenty of fluids. Don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink water or other fluids. Take sips of water, milk, or juice between bites during meals. Add liquids throughout the day. For example, have a cup of low-fat soup as an afternoon snack. Drink a full glass of water when you take a pill. Have a glass of water before you exercise. Remember, water is a good way to add fluids to your daily routine without adding calories.

Calories from sugars, saturated and trans fats, and drinks can add up quickly. As these foods provide no nutritional benefit, they should only be consumed on occasion and in limited amounts. Beverages that are calorie-free — especially water — or that contribute beneficial nutrients, such as fat-free and low-fat milk and 100% juice, should be the primary beverages you consume.

MyPlate for Older Adults

The *Dietary Guidelines* presents a general outline for a healthy diet. But as you age, some foods may be better than others for keeping you healthy and reducing your chance of illness. MyPlate for Older Adults is a companion to MyPlate, one of the federal government's nutrition guides.

MyPlate for Older Adults highlights the unique nutritional and physical activity needs of people as they age. It gives examples of foods that fit into a healthy, well-balanced diet. To learn more about MyPlate for Older Adults visit *https://hnrca.tufts.edu/myplate*.

Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamins. Vitamins help your body work the way it should. There are 13 vitamins — vitamins A, C, D, E, K, and the B vitamins (thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, biotin, B_6, B_{12}, and folate).

Vitamins have different jobs to help keep the body working properly. Some vitamins help you resist infections and keep your nerves healthy, while others may help your body get energy from food or help your blood clot properly. By following the *Dietary Guidelines*, you will get enough of most of these vitamins from food.

Minerals. Like vitamins, minerals also help your body function. Some minerals, like iodine and fluoride, are only needed in very small quantities. Others, such as calcium, magnesium, and potassium, are needed in larger amounts. As with vitamins, if you eat a varied diet, you will probably get enough of most minerals.

How Can I Get the Vitamins and Minerals I Need?

It's usually better to get the vitamins and minerals you need from food rather than a dietary supplement. That's because nutrient-dense foods contain other things that are good for you, like fiber.

Most older people can get all the nutrients they need from foods. But if you aren't sure, always talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian to find out if you're missing any important vitamins or minerals. Your doctor or dietitian may recommend a vitamin or dietary supplement. To learn how much of each vitamin and mineral is recommended for older adults, visit *www.nia.nih.gov/health/vitamins-and-minerals-older-adults*.

It's important to be aware that some supplements can have side effects, such as increasing the risk of bleeding after an injury or changing your response to anesthesia during surgery. Supplements can also interact with some medicines in ways that might cause problems. For example, vitamin K can reduce the ability of the common blood thinner warfarin to prevent blood from clotting. If you do need to supplement your diet, your doctor or pharmacist can tell you what supplements and doses are safe for you.

When looking for supplements to buy, you may feel overwhelmed by the number of choices at the pharmacy or grocery store. Look for a supplement that contains the vitamin or mineral you need without a lot of other unnecessary ingredients. Read the label to make sure the dose isn't too large. Avoid supplements with megadoses. Too much of some vitamins and minerals can be harmful, and you might be paying for supplements you don't need. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend brands that fit your needs.

Measurements for Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamins and minerals are measured in a variety of ways. The most common are:

- mg — milligram
- mcg — microgram
- IU — international unit

Micrograms are used to measure very small amounts — there are 1,000 micrograms in a milligram. The size of an international unit varies depending on the vitamin or drug it's used to measure.

Recommended Sodium Intake for Older Adults

Sodium is an important mineral. In most Americans' diets, sodium primarily comes from salt (sodium chloride). Whenever you add salt to your food, you're adding sodium. But the *Dietary Guidelines* shows that most of the sodium we eat doesn't come from our saltshakers — it's added to many foods during processing or preparation. We all need some sodium, but too much over time can lead to high blood pressure, which can raise your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

How much sodium is okay? People 51 and older should reduce their sodium intake to 2,300 mg each day. That is about 1 teaspoon of salt and includes sodium added during manufacturing or cooking as well as at the table when eating. If you have high blood pressure or prehypertension, limiting sodium intake to 1,500 mg per day, about 2/3 teaspoon of salt, may be helpful. Preparing your own meals at home without using a lot of processed foods or salt will allow you to control how much sodium you get. Try using less salt when cooking, and don't add salt before you take the first bite. If you make this change slowly, you will get used to the difference in taste. Also look for grocery products marked "low sodium," "unsalted," "no salt added," "sodium free," or "salt free." Also check the Nutrition Facts label to see how much sodium is in a serving.

Eating more fresh vegetables and fruit also helps — they are naturally low in sodium and provide more potassium. Get your sauce and dressing on the side and use only as much as you need for taste.

Smart Food Choices To Maintain a Healthy Weight

Marvin fondly thought back *to his early 20s when he was the skinny kid on the block and tried so hard to put on weight. His mom had told him the pounds would come. Now he knows she was right. In his mid-50s, Marvin weighs 15 pounds more than he did in his 40s. What happened? And what should he do about it now?*

Many factors can affect your weight, including your genes, age, gender, lifestyle, family habits, culture, sleep, and even where you live and work. Some of these factors can make it hard to maintain or achieve a healthy weight. Following a nutritious eating pattern and exercising regularly can help keep your body as healthy as possible as you age. Read on to learn why weight may change as you get older, why it's important to aim for a healthy weight, and what you can do to help meet your goals.

Why Does Weight Change as We Age?

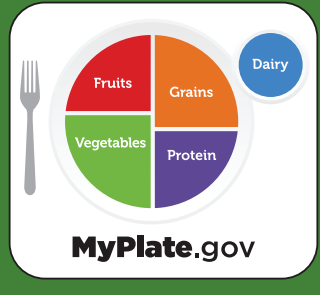
As we age, our metabolism — how the body gets energy from food — can change. This means that some older adults must become more active or eat fewer calories to maintain or achieve their ideal weight.

Other older adults may lose weight without trying. This can happen if you have less of an appetite, difficulty leaving the house to buy food, pain when chewing or swallowing, or trouble remembering to eat.

Sudden, unintended weight loss can be a sign of a serious medical problem such as cancer, gastrointestinal disorders, and even some neurological diseases. If you or a loved one is losing weight rapidly without meaning to do so, consult a health care professional to find out if there is a medical cause.

Here's a Tip

The MyPlate Plan shows your food group targets — what and how much to eat within your calorie allowance. Your food plan is personalized, based on your age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity level. Find it at **www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan.**



Why Maintain a Healthy Weight?

Keeping your weight in the normal range is an important part of healthy aging. As in other stages of life, elevated body mass index (BMI) in older adults can increase the likelihood of developing health problems. These include heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes. Losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight can help decrease these risks.

Being underweight also increases your chance of developing health problems. If you have a low BMI, you may be more likely to develop medical problems, such as osteoporosis and anemia, and it may be harder to recover from an illness or infection.

What's a Healthy Weight?

Healthy weight ranges for older adults are different than for other age groups. The number on the scale — and even BMI — only tells part of the story. For example, older adults with a normal weight may have more fat and less muscle compared to others who are slightly overweight. Always talk to your doctor before trying to lose or gain weight.

How Are Food, Exercise, and Calories Connected?

Being active and choosing healthy foods can help you maintain or achieve a healthy weight, feel more energetic, and decrease your chances of having other health problems. It's important to choose foods rich in nutrients and aim for at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week.

The energy your body gets from the foods and drinks you consume is measured in calories. Your body needs a certain number of calories each day, depending on your activity level and other factors, to maintain your current weight. To determine how many calories a day you need based on your age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity level, check out the chart on page 7 of this book or visit the MyPlate Plan at *www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan*.

To lose weight, exercise more or eat fewer calories than is recommended. To gain weight, increase the number of calories you eat while maintaining a moderate activity level.

Eating To Lose or Gain Weight

Whether you're trying to lose or gain weight, eating healthy foods matters. Try to follow a healthy eating pattern rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins. If you're concerned about your weight and want to change it, there are things you can do. Talk with a health care professional about how to make healthy changes that are right for you.

Trying to lose weight?

- Limit portion size to control calorie intake.
- Be as physically active as you can be.
- Swap out your usual foods for healthier alternatives.
- Stay hydrated with water and avoid drinks with added sugar.
- Set specific, realistic goals, such as three 15-minute walks per week.
- If there's a break in your healthy eating or exercise, try to get back on track as quickly as possible.
- Keep track of what you eat in a food diary.

Trying to gain weight?

- Eat more foods with healthy fats, such as avocados and peanut butter.
- If you get full quickly, eat frequent, smaller meals throughout the day.
- Add nutrient-dense snacks such as nuts, cheese, and dried fruit to your menu.
- Dine with friends and family to make the experience more enjoyable.
- Stay active to boost your appetite.

Make Healthy Shifts in Your Food and Beverage Choices

Eating the right amount is important, but so is making sure you're getting all the nutrients you need. Older adults often need fewer calories, but more nutrients, which makes it essential to eat nutrient-dense foods. To eat nutrient-dense foods across all the food groups, you may need to make some changes in your food and beverage choices. You can move toward a healthier eating pattern by making shifts in food choices over time. Here are some ideas:

Shift from:	Shift to:
High-calorie snacks 	Nutrient-dense snacks 
Fruit products with added sugars 	Fresh Fruit 
Refined grains 	Whole grains 
Snacks with added salt or sugars 	Snacks without added salt or sugars 
Solid fats 	Oils 

It's easy to forget about calories you consume from beverages. If you drink sodas, creamy and sweet coffee drinks, or alcohol, swapping them out for healthier options can make a huge difference. There are plenty of beverage options that are low in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. Here are some suggestions:

Shift from:	Shift to:
Medium café latte made with whole milk	Small latte made with fat-free milk
	
Regular cola	Water or water flavored with fruits or vegetables
	 
Sweetened lemon iced tea	Sparking water with natural lemon flavor
	

Another way to think about nutrient- and calorie-dense foods is to look at a variety of foods that all provide the same calories. Let's say that you wanted to have a small snack. You might choose:

- 7- or 8-inch banana
- 20 peanuts
- 3 cups low-fat popcorn
- Two regular chocolate-sandwich cookies
- 1/2 cup low-fat ice cream
- One scrambled large egg cooked with oil
- 2 ounces baked chicken breast with no skin

These choices all have about 100 calories but provide different amounts of nutrients. The right choice for you may depend on what else you're eating throughout the day.

Eating healthy isn't just about how much you eat, it's also about what you eat. Older adults should try to eat foods that are packed with nutrients while limiting foods that are high in calories but provide few nutrients. Swapping out snacks and beverages with nutrient-dense alternatives can help you get the nutrients you need while staying within your recommended number of calories.

Exercise and Physical Activity

Exercise and physical activity are good for just about everyone, including older adults. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity — working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat — each week. You don't have to accomplish this all at once; rather, you can break up your activity over the course of seven days. If you can't meet the goal right away, try to be as physically active as you can. Doing something is better than doing nothing at all.

For adults at every weight, aging is associated with muscle loss, which makes certain activities difficult. Being active can help older adults maintain muscle mass and make it

Here's a Tip

From time to time, keep a food diary. Keep track of what you eat, and check your weight once a week. Then you'll know if you are balancing the calories in and calories out and whether you need to be more active or make healthier food choices.

easier to conduct daily activities, participate in outings, drive, keep up with grandchildren, avoid falls, and stay as independent as possible.

You don't need to spend a lot of money joining a gym or hiring a personal trainer to get fit. Think about the kinds of physical activities that you enjoy. Walking, running, bicycling, gardening, swimming, dancing, and even everyday chores such as vacuuming can provide physical activity. While you're getting started with exercise, try to stay motivated to move your body regularly. Then increase the length of time you exercise or add another fun activity. Talk with your doctor before starting a new or more vigorous exercise program.

Servings and Portions

Do you have to measure or weigh everything you eat? Not really. Some people find it helps to measure things carefully at first, but once you get used to your new eating pattern, strict measuring probably won't be necessary. Understanding portion and serving sizes, as well as the difference between them, can help you better understand how much you're eating.

A "serving size" is a standard amount of a food, such as a cup or an ounce. Serving sizes can help you when choosing foods and when comparing like items while shopping, but they aren't recommendations for how much of a certain food to eat.

The term "portion" means how much of a food you're served or how much you eat. A portion size can vary from meal to meal. For example, at home you may serve yourself two small pancakes in one portion, but at a restaurant, you may get a large stack of pancakes as one portion. A portion size may also be bigger than a serving size. For example, the serving size on the Nutrition Facts label for your favorite cereal may be 1 cup, but you may pour yourself 1 and 1/2 cups in a bowl. Neither serving sizes nor portions are recommendations for how much to eat but being aware of these terms can help you make healthy food choices.

Here's a Tip

Portion size can be a problem when eating out. To keep your portion sizes under control, try ordering smaller appetizers instead of an entrée as your mean, or share and entrée with a friend. Or eat just one-half of an entrée and take the rest home to enjoy as a meal the next day.

Is Snacking Allowed?

Snacks are okay, as long as you make good choices. If you want an afternoon pick-me-up or after-dinner snack, have a piece of fruit, or spread peanut butter or low-fat cream cheese on whole wheat toast. Don't forget to include snacks in your daily food count. For example, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter spread on a slice of whole wheat toast counts toward the protein foods group and the grains group. Some ideas for healthy snacking include:

Here's a Tip

When you're out and need a snack, don't be tempted to buy a candy bar. Instead, take along a homemade trail mix in a plastic bag when you go out. If you need to buy a snack while you're on the go, pick up an apple or a banana — most convenience stores have them.

- Have an ounce of cheese with some whole grain crackers, a container of low-fat or fat-free yogurt, or a 1-ounce portion of unsalted nuts.
- Put fruit instead of candy in the bowl on your coffee table.
- Keep a container of washed, raw vegetables in the fridge along with hummus or other healthy dips.
- To limit your portion sizes, don't eat from the bag. Count out a serving and put the bag away.

More Help With Healthy Eating

How To Read Food and Beverage Labels

Carlos is 63. *He is trying to make wiser food choices but is worried about eating packaged foods and beverages. Are organic foods always healthier? Should he choose foods high in fiber and low in fat? How can he know he's making the right choices?*

Understanding what's in the foods and beverages you consume can help you make healthier decisions. In many countries, including the United States, packaged foods and drinks — the types that come in cans, boxes, bottles, jars, and bags — include nutrition and ingredient information on their labels. However, sometimes these labels can be misleading and difficult to decipher. Read on to learn about the types of information that may be printed on food and beverage packaging and get tips for how to best interpret that information.

Food and Beverage Product Dates

There are three types of product dates commonly printed on packaged foods and beverages:

- "Sell by" tells how long the manufacturer suggests that a store should sell items such as meat, poultry, eggs, or milk products. Make sure you buy by this date.
- "Use by" tells how long items will be at peak quality. If you buy or use the product after that date, some might be stale or less tasty.
- "Best if used by" (or "best if used before") tells how long the item will have the best flavor or quality.

None of these dates tell you when an item is no longer safe to eat or drink. In fact, product dates aren't required by federal regulations and are added voluntarily by manufacturers. To learn more about food safety and older adults, visit *www.foodsafety.gov/people-at-risk/older-adults*.

Nutrition Facts Labels

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires a Nutrition Facts label on most packaged foods and beverages. At the top of the Nutrition Facts label, you will find the total number of servings in the container and the food or beverage's serving size. The serving size on the label is based on the amount of food that people may typically eat at one time and isn't a recommendation of how much to eat.

The remainder of the label information is usually based on one serving of the food or beverage (see Food Label A). However, if the container has more than one serving but typically might be consumed in one sitting — such as a pint of ice cream — the label will have two additional columns (see Food Label B). The first of these columns lists the calories and nutrients in one serving. The second lists that same information for the entire container. If you eat an entire package of food that contains two servings, you will get twice as many calories, nutrients, sugar, and fat as are in one serving.

A

Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

Serving size **2/3 cup (55g)**

Amount per serving

Calories **230**

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 8g	**10%**
Saturated Fat 1g	**5%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	**0%**
Sodium 160g	**7%**
Total Carbohydrate 37g	**13%**
Dietary Fiber 4g	**14%**
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	**20%**
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 240mg	6%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

B

Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

Serving size **1 cup (255g)**

	Per serving		Per container	
Calories	**220**		**440**	
		% DV*		% DV*
Total Fat	5g	**6%**	10g	**13%**
Saturated Fat	2g	**10%**	4g	**20%**
Trans Fat	0g		0g	
Cholesterol	15mg	**5%**	30mg	**10%**
Sodium	240mg	**10%**	480mg	**21%**
Total Carb.	35g	**13%**	70g	**25%**
Dietary Fiber	6g	**21%**	12g	**43%**
Total Sugars	7g		14g	
Incl. Added Sugars	4g	**8%**	8g	**16%**
Protein	9g		18g	
Vitamin D	5mcg	25%	10mcg	50%
Calcium	200mg	15%	400mg	30%
Iron	1mg	6%	2mg	10%
Potassium	470mg	10%	940mg	20%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

No Label? No Problem.

Although frozen and canned fruits and vegetables have food labels, fresh varieties often don't. You can find nutrition information for fresh fruits and vegetables on the USDA website. Or call the USDA's Food and Nutrition Information Center at 301-504-5414.

Percent Daily Value (% DV)

The percent Daily Value (% DV) tells how much a nutrient in a serving of the food or beverage contributes to a total daily 2,000-calorie diet. Although the average person needs 2,000 calories a day to maintain their weight, individuals may need more or fewer depending on their lifestyle. If you're eating fewer calories per day and eat one serving, your % DV will be higher than what you see on the label. Some nutrients on the Nutrition Facts label do not have a % DV, but consumers can still use the number of grams to compare and choose products.

Most older adults exceed the recommended limits for saturated fats, sodium, and added sugars. Compare and choose foods to get less than 100% DV of these each day, making sure to adjust for how many calories are in your diet. Additionally, many older adults don't get the recommended amounts of dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, and potassium. Eating enough foods that contain these nutrients can reduce the risk of developing some diseases and conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and high blood pressure. Compare and choose foods to aim for 100% DV of these nutrients.

The % DV information is not calculated with the unique needs of older adults in mind. Read the nutrition label as a whole to determine how a particular food or drink fits into your healthy eating pattern.

Ingredient Lists

The ingredients in packaged food and beverage items are listed separately from (and often below) the Nutrition Facts label. This information lists each ingredient in the product by its common or usual name, and in descending order by weight. That is, the ingredient that weighs the most is listed first, and the ingredient that weighs the least is listed last.

Be on the lookout for terms that indicate added sugar, such as brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, and high-fructose corn syrup. Artificial sweeteners such as sucralose, saccharin, aspartame, and acesulfame should also be consumed in moderation. Avoid trans fats altogether — look for hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredients list.

Light, Low-Calorie, Multigrain, and Organic Labeling

Sometimes, food and beverage packaging includes terms that may try to convince the consumer the food is healthy. To help avoid confusion, the FDA sets specific rules for what food manufacturers can call "light," "low," "reduced," "free," and other terms. This type of labeling may have little to do with how nutritious the food is. Here are some examples and what they mean:

- **Light.** Light products are processed to reduce either calories or fat. This may sound healthy, but some "light" products are simply watered down. Check carefully to see if anything has been added to make up for the reduced calories and fat, such as sugar.
- **Low-fat, low-calorie, low-carb.** These foods have a legal limit to how many calories, grams of fat, or carbohydrates (carbs) they can contain per serving. However, if a serving size is very small, you may end up eating multiple servings in one sitting, ultimately consuming the same amount of fat, calories, and carbs as the regular version of the food.
- **Multigrain.** This sounds healthy but only means that a product contains more than one type of grain. Unless the product is marked as whole grain, it's possible the grains are all refined grains, which have likely lost important nutrients during processing.
- **Organic.** Products declared organic must be produced without conventional pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, biotechnology, or ionizing radiation. Organic animals must be fed organic feed and not be injected with hormones or antibiotics. Remember, organic foods may still have the same number of calories, fats, proteins, and carbs as a nonorganic food.

While these descriptions or terms are regulated by the FDA, others aren't, so always check the nutrition label to see if the product matches your healthy eating goals.

If you're unsure about an ingredient or label description, visit *www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition* to learn more.

Food Safety

Ed's mom *recently spent several days in the hospital because she got very sick after eating a hamburger that hadn't been cooked to the recommended temperature. She recovered, but now the whole family is more concerned about the safety of the foods they eat.*

Food can be unsafe for many reasons. It might be contaminated by microbes (germs) such as bacteria, viruses, or molds. These microbes might have been present before the food was harvested or collected, or they could have been introduced during handling or preparation. In either case, the food might look fine but could make you very sick. Food can also be unsafe because it has "gone bad." Sometimes you may see mold growing on the surface or smell a foul odor.

Here's a Tip

For more free information on food safety, visit **www.fsis.usda.gov**. Under "Topics," click "Fact Sheets" or call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at 888-674-6854 or visit **https:/ask.usda.gov**.

Avoid Getting Sick From Your Food

For an older person, a food-related illness can be life-threatening. As you age, you have more trouble fighting off microbes. Health problems, like diabetes or kidney disease, also make you more likely to get sick from eating foods that are unsafe. Be careful about how food is prepared and stored and use your senses to tell whether food has gone bad.

Taste and smell. As you grow older, your senses of taste and smell might change. Or medicines might make things taste different. If you can't rely on your sense of taste or smell to tell that food is spoiled, be extra careful about how you handle your food. If something doesn't look, smell, or taste right, throw it out — don't take a chance with your health.

Here's a Tip

Sometimes the government recalls food that could be unsafe. A recall means the food manufactures and grocers are instructed to take the food off the market. You can keep track of recent recalls at **www.foodsafety.gov/recalls-and-outbreaks.**

Storage. Food safety starts with storing your food properly. Sometimes that's as simple as following directions on the container. For example, if the label says, "refrigerate after opening," do that! It's also a good idea to keep any canned and packaged items in a cool place.

When you're ready to use a packaged food, check the date on the label. That bottle of juice might have been in your cabinet so long it's now out of date.

Try to use refrigerated leftovers within three or four days to reduce your risk of food poisoning. Throw away foods older than that or those that show moldy areas.

Foods and medicines. Some foods, and also caffeine and alcohol, are unsafe to take with certain medicines. A food-medicine interaction can prevent a medicine from working the way it should, cause a side effect from a medicine to get worse, cause a new side effect, or change the way your body processes the food or medicine. For example, some statins (cholesterol medicines) act differently on the body if you consume large amounts of grapefruit juice. Every time you use a new medicine, check the label for interactions. If you have any questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Food Safety When Cooking

When preparing foods, follow four basic steps — clean, separate, cook, and chill.

Clean. Wash your hands, the cutting board, and the counter with hot, soapy water, and make sure knives and other utensils are clean before you start to prepare food. Clean the lids of cans before opening. Rinse fruits and vegetables under running water but don't use soap or detergent. Don't rinse raw meat or poultry before cooking — you might contaminate other things by splashing disease-causing microbes around.

Keep your refrigerator clean, especially the vegetable and meat bins. When there is a spill, use hot, soapy water to clean it up.

Here's a Tip

Remember to rinse all fruits and vegetables under running water, even if you plan to peel before eating. That's because it's easy to transfer bacteria from the peel or rind to the inside of your fruits and veggies when you're cutting.

Separate. Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs (and their juices and shells) away from foods that won't be cooked, both in your shopping cart and in your refrigerator when you get home.

When you're cooking, it's also important to keep ready-to-eat foods like fresh produce or bread apart from food that will be cooked. Use a different knife and cutting board for fresh produce than you use for raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Or use one set and cut all the fresh produce before handling foods that will be cooked. Wash your utensils and cutting board in hot, soapy water or the dishwasher, and clean the counter and your hands afterwards. If you put raw meat, poultry, or seafood on a plate, wash the plate in hot, soapy water before reusing it for cooked food.

Cook. Use a food thermometer. Put it in the thickest part of the food you're cooking to check that the inside has reached the right temperature. Whole cuts of meat and seafood should be cooked to at least 145 F. Ground meats and egg dishes should be cooked to at least 160 F. All poultry, hot dogs, and luncheon meats should be cooked to at least 165 F. Bring sauces, marinades, soups, and gravy to a boil when reheating.

Chill. Keeping foods cold slows the growth of microbes, so your refrigerator should always be at 40 F or below. The freezer should be at 0 F or below. But just because you set the thermostat for 40 F doesn't mean it actually reaches that temperature. Use refrigerator/freezer thermometers to check.

Put food in the refrigerator within two hours of buying or cooking it. If the outside temperature is over 90 F, refrigerate within one hour. Put leftovers in a clean, shallow container that is covered and dated. Use or freeze leftovers within three or four days. To learn more about how long certain foods last in the fridge or freezer, visit *www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts*.

Here's a Tip

You may have always thought you should let hot foods cool before putting them in the refrigerator. Not true. Putting hot food item in the fridge as soon as possible will keep bacteria from growing in your food. Divide food into smaller portions, place in shallow containers, and refrigerate.

Overcoming Roadblocks to Healthy Eating

Isabella is so busy, *she often picks up dinner at a fast-food restaurant or the food court at her local shopping mall. She only stops at the grocery store for milk, bread, snacks, and prepared meals. Isabella wants to start making healthy food choices, but she thinks that most healthy foods are bland and is worried about sticking to her budget.*

Healthy eating can help you lose or maintain weight, feel better overall, and possibly decrease your chances of getting certain diseases. Making smart food choices is important at any age. But eating healthy can be difficult even if you know which foods you should buy and prepare. Your budget, physical issues, mood changes, and dietary restrictions can be roadblocks to eating food that's best for you. Here are suggestions for dealing with common problems that can make it harder for older adults to follow through on smart food choices.

Trying To Eat Healthy on a Budget?

Even when you know which healthy foods to choose, you may not be able to buy what's ideal if you live on a fixed or limited income. Start by deciding how much you can afford to spend on food.

There are a number of resources that can help you plan a food budget. For example, the USDA supports Iowa State University's Spend Smart-Eat Smart program at *https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu*. This website also features more than 100 inexpensive recipes, with nutrition information and cost per serving.

Here's a Tip

It's never too late to learn some cooking skills — or refresh those you might not have used in a while. You can go online to find information on basic cooking techniques and recipes for one person. Borrow simple cookbooks from your local library or try an adult education cooking course. TV cooking shows might be helpful — they often show you step-by-step instructions and pre-portioned ingredients. If you have questions about cooking, your local grocery store may even have cooking coaches available who can help.

Once you have decided on your budget, look for grocery store advertising in the newspaper or online to see what's on sale. Try to plan some meals around featured items and consider purchasing extra nonperishables, such as canned goods, when they are on sale. Use coupons when possible and ask your grocery store staff if they have a senior discount or loyalty rewards program. Consider buying store-brand products, which are often the same as more expensive brand-name ones. Focus on buying healthy and inexpensive produce. Many nutritious fruits and vegetables — such as bananas, apples, oranges, lettuce, green peppers, and carrots — may be reasonably priced.

No matter how careful you are, the cost of food can still eat up a big part of your budget. There may be additional help. Here are some federal government programs:

SNAP
www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (the program in your state may have a different name), 800-221-5689. This used to be called Food Stamps. A special debit card can be used to buy most types of food, as well as seeds and plants to grow food.

Child and Adult Care Food Program
www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp. Provides meals and snacks to eligible older adults taking part in adult day care programs.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program
www.fns.usda.gov/csfp/commodity-supplemental-food-program. Provides some canned vegetables and fruits, grain products, dry beans, canned meats, and dairy products to eligible older people to supplement their own food.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program
www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/emergency-food-assistance-program. Provides food needed by low-income older adults who might not have enough to eat.

There are also private groups working with older people to help them get enough food:

Feeding America
www.feedingamerica.org, 800-771-2303. A network of food banks that offers several food assistance programs, including the Senior Grocery program, which provides balanced, nutritious meals that can be made at home.

Food Bank Locator
www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank

USDA National Hunger Hotline
www.fns.usda.gov/partnerships/national-hunger-clearinghouse, 866-348-6479 (Spanish, 877-842-6273). The Hotline can help people in need find emergency food supplies and government assistance programs.

While some older people have trouble finding enough money to buy food, others need help preparing meals. There are a variety of groups that deliver meals to people who have trouble getting out of their homes. These groups usually offer one hot meal a day. One of the largest is Meals on Wheels America, at *www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org* or 888-998-6325 (toll-free).

National Resources for Locating Help With Food Costs

There are several ways to learn more about programs that offer help with meals or food costs. You could contact each program listed above separately, or you could use one of these services:

- Eldercare Locator, *https://eldercare.acl.gov* or call 800-677-1116
- Federal and state benefit information, *www.benefits.gov* or call 800-333-4636
- National Council on Aging, *www.benefitscheckup.org*

Tired of Cooking or Eating Alone?

Maybe you're tired of planning and cooking dinner every night. Have you considered potluck meals? If everyone brings one part of the meal, cooking is a lot easier, and there might be leftovers to share. Or try cooking with a friend to make a meal you can enjoy together. Food delivery services are yet another option. You could also look into having some meals at a nearby senior center, community center, or religious facility. Not only will you enjoy a free or low-cost meal, but you will have some company while you eat.

Problems Chewing or Swallowing Food?

Do you avoid some foods because they are hard to chew? People who have problems with their teeth or dentures often avoid eating meat, fruits, or vegetables and might miss out on important nutrients. If you're having trouble chewing, see your dentist to check for problems. If you wear dentures, the dentist can check how they fit.

If food seems to get stuck in your throat, it might be that less saliva in your mouth is making it hard for you to swallow your food. Or there may be other reasons you're having trouble swallowing your food, including problems with the muscles or nerves in your throat, problems with your esophagus, or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). Talk with your doctor about what might be causing your swallowing issues.

Physical Problems Making It Hard To Eat?

Sometimes illnesses like Parkinson's disease, stroke, or arthritis can make it harder for you to cook or feed yourself. Your doctor might recommend an occupational therapist. The therapist might make a custom splint for your hand, give you special exercises to strengthen your muscles, or suggest rearranging things in your kitchen. Special utensils and plates might make mealtimes easier or help with food preparation.

Food Tastes Different?

Are foods not as tasty as you remember? It might not be the cook's fault! Maybe your sense of taste, smell, or both has changed. Growing older, having dental problems, and experiencing medication side effects can cause your senses to change. Taste and smell are important for healthy appetite and eating. Try adding fresh herbs, spices, or lemon juice to your plate.

Smoking and drinking alcohol can also affect your sense of taste. If you smoke, quitting may not only improve your sense of taste and smell, but also your health in many other ways. If you drink alcohol, consider stopping or cutting back.

Some medicines can change how food tastes, make your mouth dry, or reduce your appetite. In turn, some foods can change how certain medicines work. You might have heard that grapefruit juice is a common culprit when used with any of several drugs. Chocolate, licorice, and alcohol are some others. Whenever your doctor prescribes a new drug for you, be sure to ask about any food-drug interactions.

Just Not Hungry?

Changes to your body as you age can cause some people to feel full sooner than they did when they were younger. Lack of appetite can also be a side effect of a medicine you're taking. Your doctor might be able to suggest a different drug.

Try to be more active. In addition to all the other benefits of exercise and physical activity, they may make you hungrier.

If you aren't hungry because food just isn't appealing, there are ways to make it more interesting. Make sure your foods are seasoned well, but not with extra salt. Try using lemon juice, vinegar, or herbs to boost the flavor of your food.

Vary the shape, color, and texture of foods you eat. When you go shopping, look for a new vegetable, fruit, or seafood you haven't tried before or one you haven't eaten in a while. Some grocery stores have recipe cards near items, or you can ask the staff for suggestions about preparing the new food or find recipes online. Foods that are overcooked tend to have less flavor. Try cooking or steaming your vegetables for a shorter time and see if that gives them a crunch that will help spark your interest.

Too Sad To Eat?

Being unhappy can cause a loss of appetite. Feeling down every once in a while is normal, but if these feelings persist, talk with your doctor. Help and treatment options are available. For more information, read "Depression and Older Adults" at *www.nia.nih.gov/health/depression-and-older-adults*.

Food Allergies or Dietary Restrictions?

Some older adults have allergies to certain foods, such as wheat, nuts, or dairy. Others may have dietary restrictions for religious, ethical, or personal reasons. Whatever your dietary needs are, it's still possible to choose healthy foods.

Avoiding dairy? Talk to your health care provider about how to get enough calcium and vitamin D. Even lactose-intolerant people might be able to have small amounts of milk when taken with food. There are also nondairy food sources of calcium, lactose-free milk and milk products, calcium- and vitamin D-fortified foods, and supplements.

Gluten sensitivity or allergy? For resources that explain the different types of gluten allergies and how to make smart food choices for each type, visit *https://medlineplus.gov/glutensensitivity.html*.

Vegetarian or vegan? To learn how to incorporate plant-based protein into your diet, visit *www.nutrition.gov/topics/basic-nutrition/eating-vegetarian*.

Sample Menus and Recipes

Answering the question "what should I eat?" doesn't need to leave you feeling baffled and frustrated. In fact, when you have the right information and motivation, you can feel good about making healthy choices. Use these tips to plan healthy and delicious meals:

- **Plan in advance.** Meal planning takes the guesswork out of eating and can help ensure you eat a variety of nutritious foods throughout the day.
- **Find budget-friendly foods.** Create a shopping list in advance to help stick to a budget and follow these SNAP-friendly recipes, available at *https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/nutrition-education/snap-ed-recipes*.
- **Consider preparation time.** Some meals can be made in as little as five minutes. If you love cooking, or if you're preparing a meal with or for friends or family, you may want to try something a little more challenging.
- **Keep calories in mind.** The number of calories people need each day varies by individual. Always discuss your weight and fitness goals with your health care provider before making big changes.

Below is a sample day's menu to show you how easy it can be. It provides 2,000 calories and doesn't exceed the recommended amount of sodium or calories from saturated fats and added sugars. You might need to eat fewer or more calories, depending on your height, weight, activity level, and whether you're a man or a woman.

Sample Menu

Breakfast

½ whole wheat bagel
- 2 tablespoons of creamy peanut butter

1 medium banana

Coffee
- ¼ cup milk
- 2 teaspoons sugar

Fat-free strawberry yogurt (8 ounces)

Lunch

Tuna salad sandwich
- 2 slices 100% whole wheat bread
- 2 ounces canned tuna
- 2 teaspoons mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons chopped celery
- 1 medium leaf lettuce

4 baby carrots

¼ cup raisins

1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Dinner

Spaghetti & meatballs
- 1 cup cooked spaghetti
- ¼ cup spaghetti sauce
- ¼ cup diced tomatoes (canned, no salt added)
- 3 medium meatballs
- 1 tablespoon parmesan cheese

½ medium raw apple

1 cup water

Garden salad
- 1 cup mixed greens
- 3 slices cucumber
- ¼ cup cubed avocado
- ¼ cup garbanzo beans (canned, low sodium)
- 3 tablespoons shredded, reduced-fat cheddar cheese
- 1 tablespoon ranch dressing

Below are additional options for meals and snacks Recipes for the dishes below can be found at *www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen/recipes*.

Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Smoothie with spinach, fruit, and yogurt
- Vegetable omelet with whole-grain toast
- Oatmeal with banana and nonfat frozen yogurt
- Eggs with sauteed kale and sweet potato

Lunch

- Chicken, tomato, avocado sandwich on whole-grain bread
- Quinoa with stir-fried vegetables
- Black bean and sweet potato quesadillas
- Avocado tuna salad

Dinner

- Chicken breast, roasted vegetables, hummus
- Roasted salmon, zucchini, and sweet potato
- Grilled skirt steak with tomato and onion
- Seared cod with spinach and olives

Snacks

- Baby carrots and hummus
- Celery with natural peanut butter
- Fruit and yogurt
- Air-popped popcorn seasoned with chili and garlic powder

Looking for even more options? Explore healthy recipes at the following websites:

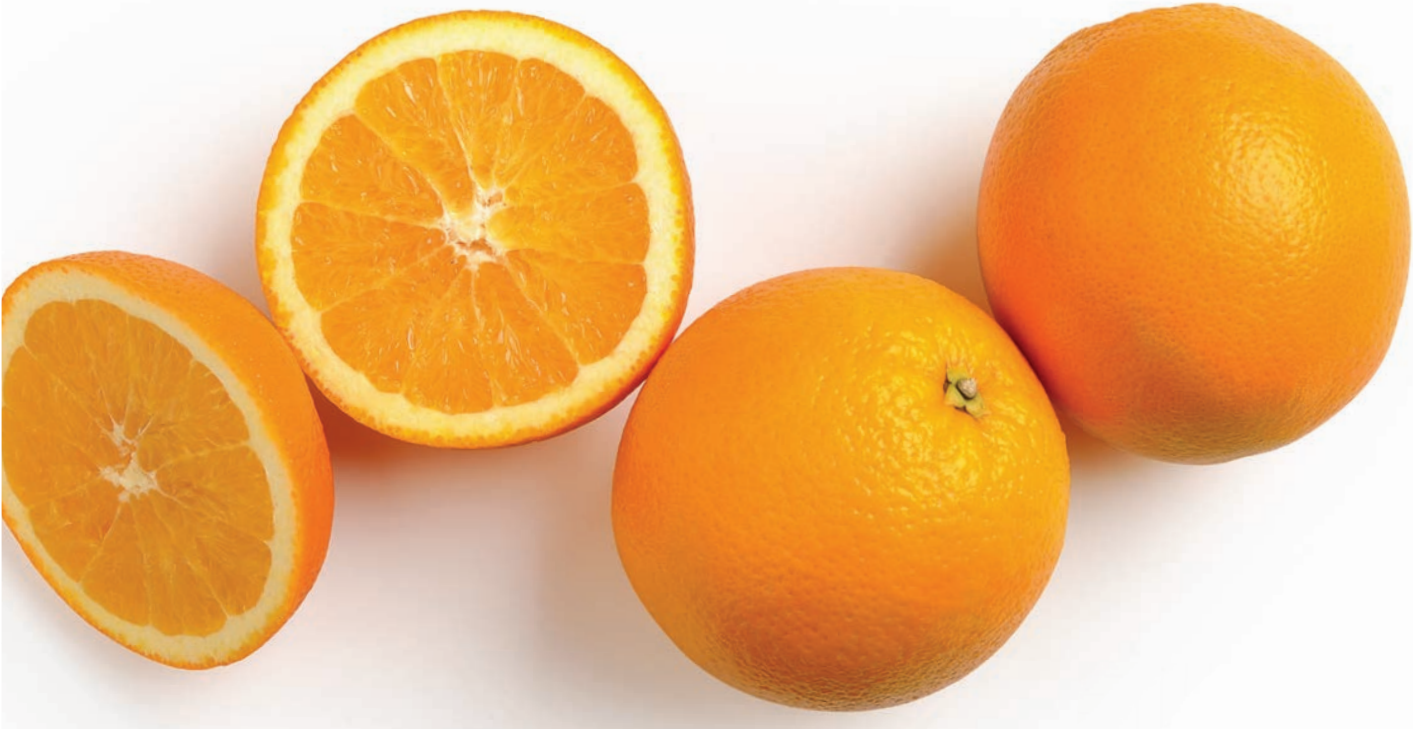
What's Cooking? USDA Healthy Mixing Bowl
https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/resource/usda-mixing-bowl

MyPlate.gov Recipes, Cookbooks, and Menus
www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen

Nutrition.gov Recipes
www.nutrition.gov/recipes

Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH (NHLBI)
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/new_dash.pdf

Trying to lose weight? Sample menus for 1,200- and 1,600-calorie recipes are available at *www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/eat/menus*. These sample menus reflect several culinary styles: traditional American cuisine, Asian-American cuisine, Southern cuisine, Mexican-American cuisine, and vegetarian cuisine.



A Heathier Future

Thinking about what's on your plate and shifting toward a healthier eating pattern can help you live better and longer. Changing your eating habits might not be easy at first, but as you incorporate smart food choices into your daily life, you will begin to make changes without thinking.

Keep this book handy and refer to it when you're unsure or need more information. With good nutrition and increased physical activity a part of your daily life, you will be taking charge of your health — maybe even making it better with age.

For More Information

NIA offers free information about health and aging in English and Spanish.

National Institute on Aging Information Center
800-222-2225
800-222-4225 (TTY)
niaic@nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov/health
https://order.nia.nih.gov

Visit the NIA Information Center to find more health and aging information, subscribe to email alerts, and order publications.

Here is a list of some other resources for information on nutrition.

Federal Government Resources:

Dietary Guidelines for Americans
www.dietaryguidelines.gov

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116
eldercarelocator@n4a.org
https://eldercare.acl.gov

Food and Drug Administration
888-463-6332
www.fda.gov

Food Safety Information
888-674-6854
(Meat and Poultry Hotline)
www.fsis.usda.gov
www.foodsafety.gov

Health.gov
www.health.gov

MedlinePlus
888-346-3656
www.medlineplus.gov

Move Your Way
https://health.gov/moveyourway

MyPlate
www.myplate.gov

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
877-645-2448
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
800–860–8747
866–569–1162 (TTY)
www.niddk.nih.gov

Nutrition.gov
www.nutrition.gov

Office of Dietary Supplements
301-435-2920
ods@nih.gov
https://ods.od.nih.gov

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans
https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/physical-activity-guidelines

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
202-720-2791
(USDA Information Hotline)
www.usda.gov

USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp

USDA Food and Nutrition Information Center
301-504-5414
www.nal.usda.gov/fnic

Non-Federal Resources:

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
800-877-1600 (toll-free)
www.eatright.org

American Heart Association
800-242-8721 (toll-free)
www.heart.org

Feeding America
800-910-5524 (toll-free)
www.feedingamerica.org

Iowa State University — Spend Smart Eat Smart
foodsavings@iastate.edu
https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu

LocalHarvest
831-515-5602
www.localharvest.org/csa

Meals on Wheels America
888-998-6325
www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
202-682-6899
www.nanasp.org

Publication No. 22-AG-7708
September 2022